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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the potential impact on enrollment of raising academic admissions requirements for first-semester freshmen at Stephen F. Austin University (Texas). Data collected in spring 1998 included three years of enrollment and admissions data from SFA's admissions office, 1995-96 statewide high school graduate and individual school characteristics from the Texas Education Agency, and statewide test performance data for 1996-97 and 1997-98 from the American College Testing Program. Telephone interviews were also conducted with admissions directors from a number of institutions identified as having raised their standards. Data analysis involved: (1) determining current sources of new freshmen and the extent to which alterations in enrollment policies might raise the institution's admissions profile; (2) determining the kinds of change in application/enrollment rates required to significantly raise the proportion of high-ability entering students; (3) identifying competing institutions; and (4) assessing probable enrollment consequences of raising admissions requirements. The study concluded that it was unlikely that current yields of high-ability students could be improved upon, and that raising admissions standards would likely result in a short-term decline in new freshmen enrollment. It was suggested that SFA keep current admissions standards in place, use low-profile efforts to attract high-ability students, and gradually increase admissions standards. Eight charts and 10 tables are appended. (CH)

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INCREASING THE ENTERING STUDENT ADMISSIONS PROFILE AT STEPHEN F. AUSTIN UNIVERSITY: A FEASIBILITY STUDY

August 31, 1998

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INCREASING THE ENTERING STUDENT ADMISSIONS PROFILE AT STEPHEN F. AUSTIN UNIVERSITY: A FEASIBILITY STUDY

A. Background and General Approach

In September, 1997 Stephen F. Austin University (SFA) distributed a request for proposal (RFP) for a "Study to Determine the Potential Impact on Enrollment of Raising Academic Admissions Requirements for First-Semester Freshmen." The National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS) responded to this RFP and was awarded a contract to undertake the study in November, 1997. An NCHEMS team made a site visit to SFA on December 15 to more fully define the study's objectives and to identify specific areas of needed information. Data were then collected and analyzed throughout the spring of 1998. This report presents initial findings of the NCHEMS study.

Data used in the study were drawn from four principal sources. First, SFA's Admissions Office and the Office of Institutional Research supplied detailed data on enrollments and admissions activity for the past three years. The admissions data supplied included applications, admits, and new freshman enrollments broken down by geographic origin and individual high school of origin, and were provided for a variety of student populations. More limited data on student persistence after enrollment by entering student ability-level were obtained directly from SFA. Second, data on statewide high school graduates and individual school characteristics were obtained from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for 1995-96. These data included student demographics and average performance on the SAT and ACT examinations broken down by individual high school district. Additional data obtained from TEA explicitly examined the distribution of students who scored higher than 1110 on the SAT or 24 or higher on the ACT Assessment across high schools—setting the definition of "high ability" for college-bound students used throughout the NCHEMS report. Third, ACT was able to supply detailed data on test performance on the ACT Assessment on a statewide basis for the years 1996-97 and 1997-98—as well data on where students applying to SFA also sent their admissions test results. Although similar data could not be obtained on the SAT from the College Board, the ACT results proved adequate to identify the institutions that SFA competes with in attempting to admit high-ability first-time freshmen. Finally, telephone interviews were conducted with the admissions directors of a number of institutions identified as having raised their admissions standards. These interviews included three Texas public institutions (Texas Tech, North Texas, and Southwest Texas), and three public institutions drawn from other parts of the country (SUNY-Geneseo, Southwest Missouri State University, and Truman State University). The primary purpose of these interviews was to determine the specific strategies used by these institutions in raising their admissions profiles, the degree to which these strategies were successful, and any short-term or long-term consequences for enrollment that each may have experienced as a result.

Using these data, the basic analytical approach involved three main lines of inquiry.

- **examining current sources of new freshmen and the extent to which alterations in current policies might potentially raise the institution's entering admissions profile.**

This, in turn, required determining current areas of market penetration for both general enrollments and high-ability enrollments in relation to available recruitment pools and examining admissions yields systematically for individual counties (and, where feasible, high schools) within each of these high-yield areas. These analyses used data on applications, admits, and newly-enrolled freshmen obtained from SFA, data on college-bound students obtained from ACT, and data on high school graduates obtained through TEA. Because data from all three sources were only available for a single year, all analyses were based on the Fall, 1996 entering class at SFA. Examination of recruitment patterns by geographic region and high school in Fall 1995 and Fall 1997 using SFA data alone did not reveal substantial differences among these three years that might invalidate this analysis.

- **determining through simulation what kinds of changes in current application and enrollment rates would be required to significantly raise the proportion of high-ability entering students at SFA.** These simulations used data from the previous analysis as a baseline to build a model designed to examine the limits of various strategies for increasing the recruitment of high-ability students. More specifically, the model involved testing out different values for various combinations of admissions variables within particular geographic areas to determine their various impacts on the number and proportion of high-ability entering freshmen.

- **identifying the types of institutions SFA competes with in recruiting high-ability students in order to assess the feasibility of the strategies identified above.** This analysis rested primarily on data supplied by ACT for 1996-97 and 1997-98 about the characteristics of those interested in, applying to, and enrolling in SFA and data from the same source identifying all other institutions to which students applying to SFA sent their test scores.

- **assessing the probable enrollment consequences of raising admissions requirements based on the experiences of other institutions.** This analysis rested primarily on the interviews conducted with representatives of other institutions.

Results for each line of inquiry are presented in four sections which comprise the main body of the report. Overall conclusions and recommendations are summarized in a final section.

B. Historical Sources of New Freshmen

Historically, SFA has recruited new freshmen from a comparatively well-defined and quite delimited set of geographic regions within the state of Texas. Of the approximately 1900 enrolled freshmen in the Fall of 1996, for instance, four counties accounted for almost half of this total. Another nineteen counties—each generating between 20 and 100 enrollments— accounted for an additional third of SFA's incoming freshmen. The degree of regional concentration is shown graphically in Chart 1 which shows the cumulative proportion of entering student enrollment accounted for by each successive county. As this display also shows, high-ability students (following TEA guidelines, defined as those with combined SAT scores of 1110 or above or with ACT Assessment Composite scores of over 24) are currently drawn from

approximately the same geographic regions as are regular freshmen. In large measure, this is because these counties are also where most of the state's high-ability high school graduates are located. As Charts 2 and 3 indicate, those counties with the highest concentrations of high-ability high school graduates are for the most part also those from which SFA currently recruits large numbers of entering freshmen at all ability levels. These few counties, moreover, account for over three-quarters of the state's entire pool of high-ability college-bound students. In short, the institution's recruitment efforts are already looking in the right places for high-ability students.

A closer look at Chart 2, however, shows that the current recruitment pool contains four distinct market regions of two quite different characters. The first comprises SFA's "local" market region—those counties immediately surrounding the campus (Nacogdoches, Angelina, Jasper, Gregg, Orange, Cherokee, Shelby, Smith, and Rusk). The second market area consists of three distinct urban/suburban regions with similar characteristics and enrollment patterns: a) the greater Houston area (Harris, Fort Bend, Montgomery, Galveston, Brazoria, and Jefferson Counties), b) the greater Dallas area (Dallas, Tarrant, Collin, Denton and Ellis Counties) and, c) a Central Texas area centered on Austin/San Antonio (Travis, Bexar and Williamson Counties). As shown in Table 1, approximately one fifth of SFA's new freshman are drawn from surrounding local counties, as are about 23% of its entering high-ability students. This region, however, comprises only about 3% of the state's total pool of high-ability students. The three urban/suburban recruitment areas, in contrast, account for about sixty percent of total new freshman enrollment at SFA and constitute about the same proportion of SFA's entering high-ability students. This second market area, moreover, generates over seventy percent of the state's available pool of high-ability high school graduates. What this means in terms of overall volumes of recruitment activity is shown graphically by Chart 4. Extremely large numbers of total applications are generated by the Houston and Dallas areas in particular but, largely because these are regions in which other institutions are also recruiting vigorously, these applications result in relatively fewer (though still a majority) of new enrollments. High-ability students, more significantly, constitute only a small proportion of admissions activity in all four areas.

As Chart 4 also suggests, the dynamics of admission vary considerably across market areas. Charts 5 and 6, for example, portray overall admissions activity in each region in two different ways. The first (Chart 5) presents the percentages of total high college-bound school graduates (defined by those taking the SAT or ACT examinations) within each region applying to, accepted by, and ultimately enrolling in SFA as new freshmen. The second, in parallel, examines the percentage of applicants who are admitted in comparison with the percentage of admittees who actually enrolled. The first chart, therefore, is a measure of "market penetration" while the second examines the decisions made respectively by the institution and by admitted students. As Chart 5 indicates (and certainly as might be expected) SFA draws applications from a considerably higher proportion of the total high school graduating pool in its immediate area than is the case elsewhere. A higher-than-average proportion of those applying from within this region, moreover, end up enrolling. This situation is highlighted by Chart 6, which shows that acceptance rates do not vary markedly across regions, and that the percentages of those admitted that enroll are approximately the same in all three components of the current urban/suburban market area.

Charts 7 and 8 repeat these portraits for high-ability students, defined as those with SAT scores of 1110 or above. While virtually all such students are accepted by the institution, it is notable that SFA continues to show a marked recruitment advantage within its own surrounding area in terms of both the percentage of such high-school graduates applying and with respect to those actually enrolling. Although penetration rates are somewhat lower in the Central Texas region, moreover, admissions yield ratios are about the same across all three components of the urban/suburban market area.

There is also some geographic variance in admissions performance among the individual counties that make up each market area. Tables 2-5, for instance, break down the kind of information contained in summary form in Charts 5-8 by individual county. Tables 4 and 5 also present data on the relative sizes that each county represents of SFA's total freshman class. Together, these displays can support a somewhat more fine-grained examination of what is happening with respect to high-ability students. Looking within the SFA local region (Tables 2 and 4), for example, Nacogdoches County dominates both application and enrollment rates for total students and for high-ability students—as well as representing a sizeable share of entering freshmen enrollment in both categories. This is despite the fact that Nacogdoches has only about half to a third of the college-bound high school graduates as do neighboring counties like Orange, Gregg, Smith, and Angelina. As is evident, SFA does next best in recruiting high-ability students within its relatively contiguous counties—including Angelina, Shelby and Rusk. Remaining counties in the "outer tier" of the region such as Gregg, Orange, Jasper and Smith approach the pattern shown by urban/suburban market region counties, though they still generate somewhat greater yields for high-ability students in terms of the percent of pool enrolling. Taken together, this pattern indicates that geographic distance exerts a powerful influence on the decision to apply and enroll for students within the immediate region—even for high-ability students.

Turning to counties outside SFA's immediate area, a more homogeneous pattern is apparent—especially with regard to high-ability students. Within both the greater Houston and greater Dallas areas, application rates for high-ability students are fairly uniform; here the only outlier is Galveston—somewhat curious in the light of the performances of Brazoria and Fort Bend which are also on the south side of the Houston metropolitan area. Conversion rates to freshman enrollment for high-ability students in the greater Dallas area, though, are generally below their Houston counterparts, with the significant exceptions of Dallas and Tarrant Counties which contain relatively sizeable pools of high-ability students. Collin and Denton Counties, on the north side of Dallas, are markedly lower-than-average with respect to the proportion of admits actually enrolling, probably because of the influence of North Texas which is located in this area. [Impressive yields for Ellis County can be largely discounted because of the relatively small numbers of high-ability candidates present in the first place.] Overall application and yield rates are markedly lower for all three Central Texas counties—largely because of both geographic distance and the presence of significant regional competition.

C. Potential Increases in the Yield of High-Ability Students

Taken together, results of the previous section suggest that SFA is already looking in the right places for high-ability students and that extending the institution's recruitment reach would likely

not yield significant benefits. Within the immediate region, the institution's capacity to attract such students is already high and, in most cases, would be difficult to improve upon. As a result, significant alteration of the admissions profile would rest heavily on obtaining higher application rates and accepted applicant conversion rates in the three components of the established urban/suburban market area.

How much higher would these rates have to be in order to obtain substantially greater numbers of high-ability entering freshmen? To address this question, a dynamic model was constructed to simulate enrollment yields for high-ability students under varying conditions. This model was created at the county level using initial parameters corresponding to the Fall, 1996 entering class. Fixed elements of the model included the number of high school graduates in each county with SAT scores of 1110 or greater and an assumed 100% SFA acceptance rate for such students. Manipulable variables in the model included the proportion of each county's high-SAT recruitment pool applying to SFA and the corresponding proportion of accepted applicants enrolling at SFA. Because of the limited geographic extent of SFA's current market, the model included only the "high-yield" counties used in the analyses above. These twenty-three counties account for over 80% of SFA's high-ability students. Their admissions patterns with respect to application and enrollment rates, moreover, closely match those of counties responsible for generating the remaining 20%.

A first step in simulating enrollments involved creating a "base model" by standardizing individual county values within each region (or, in some cases, within sub-regions) on the highest-yield county or counties in each group. Constructed in this way, the "base" model suggests the maximum gains that could be made by a strategy aimed at bringing every county up to a yield-level previously achieved by SFA somewhere in the region. Using this logic, the "base model" was constructed as follows:

- within the SFA region,
  - Nacogdoches County was held at approximately its current values for high-ability students (66.7% of the pool applying and 80% of accepted applicants enrolling); this was done because it seems unlikely that these already high values could be much improved upon.
  - all "first tier" counties immediately contiguous to Nacogdoches County were standardized at approximately the highest current values within this sub-region (40% of the pool applying and 60% of accepted applicants enrolling); these values correspond to current yields in Jasper County.
  - all "second tier" counties not immediately contiguous to Nacogdoches County were also standardized at approximately the highest current values within this sub-region (25% of the pool applying and 50% of accepted applicants enrolling; these values correspond to current yields in Orange County.

- within the greater Houston and greater Dallas areas, all counties were standardized on the highest current values for heavily-populated counties such as Harris, Tarrant, Ft. Bend, and Montgomery within these regions (5% of the pool applying and 33.3% of accepted applicants enrolling).

- within the Central Texas area, all counties were raised to values for Travis county—the current highest-yield county within this area (3% of the pool applying and 33.3% of accepted applicants applying).

Results for the base model generated a total of 339 high-ability new freshmen constituting 22.5% of the entering class; the corresponding actual numbers for these counties in the fall of 1996 were 262 high-ability new freshmen constituting 17.4% of the entering class. Moving acceptance and enrollment rates to the highest levels now being attained in each of the "cachement" areas identified would, therefore, yield an additional 77 high-ability freshmen.

These results seem attainable as they do not involve exceeding a performance already reached at least somewhere in each region. They do not, however, result in particularly substantial increases in entering student ability levels. Put one way, such a shift would correspond approximately to a 15 point gain in the average freshman entering SAT. Put another way, achieving this result would increase the (already low) probability of a given faculty member encountering a high-ability students in, say, a particular freshman class by about 25%. Greater yields than these would require SFA's recruitment performance to exceed any values historically attained within each recruiting region. To establish the reasonableness of achieving such gains, parameters in the "base" model were successively varied to determine what it would take to approximately double the number of entering high-ability students (from the current 250 or so to about 500). Because admissions yields were expected to have reached close to maximum values already within the SFA local region, these simulations only involved manipulating parameters for the three components of the urban/suburban market area.

Results of this analysis are shown in Table 6. As shown, approximately doubling the number of entering high-ability students would require the proportion of the high-ability pool applying to SFA from all high-yield counties in the three identified urban/suburban markets to be raised from its current 3-5% range to about 7%. At the same time, the percentage of applicants enrolling would have to be increased from current values in the 25-35% range to about 42.5%. These parameters, of course, are independent of one another and other scenarios can be contemplated. Roughly speaking, for example, each increment of half a percent in the proportion of the pool applying yields an additional 25 high-ability students or about 1.7% of total. Each increment of two-and-a-half percent in the proportion of applicants enrolling, in turn, yields an additional 17.5 high-ability students or about 1.2% of total. In the limiting cases, therefore, doubling the proportion of high-ability entering students might be theoretically accomplished by raising the overall application rate to just over 9% without altering any other factors, or by raising the enrollment rate of accepted students to approximately 63% without altering any other factors. Either of these results, of course, would mean raising the admissions yields of all counties in the greater Houston and greater Dallas areas to levels that approximate those in SFA's immediate area.

D. Analyzing the Competition

As the previous analysis suggests, achieving significant increases in the proportion of entering high-ability freshmen would require noticeable increases in the proportion of the established applicant pool in the greater Houston and greater Dallas areas applying to SFA in the first place and would also require substantial increases in the percentage of such individuals, once admitted, deciding to enroll at SFA. Both requisites, of course, involve direct competition with other institutions that are trying to do the same thing. The fact that SFA appears to have topped out in recruiting such students from its own immediate region, together with the fact that relatively few high-ability students are generated by this region in the first place, means that such head-to-head competition cannot be avoided. This raises the question of what the nature of existing competition already is, and of the feasibility of achieving the kinds of increases determined through simulation in the previous section.

One way to approach this question is to examine the existing overlaps of established institutional markets as revealed by where prospective students send their admissions test scores. As noted, data on this issue were available for both 1996-97 and for 1997-98 from ACT. Similar data on SAT score distribution were not, unfortunately, available from the College Board. Using the ACT data alone, however, appears to provide a representative picture. Data from TEA reveal that about two-thirds as many Texas high-school graduates took the ACT as completed the SAT in 1995-96 (about 52,000 vs. about 78,000). This proportion is relatively constant across the regions from which SFA recruits. Many students, moreover, take both assessments. The distribution of high-performing ACT test-takers (defined as achieving a score of 24 or above) also closely matches that of high-performing SAT test-takers (defined as achieving a combined score of 1110 or above). Exactly the same proportions between SAT and ACT test-takers by region are also apparent in SFA's own 1996 admissions statistics.

Available data on ACT test-takers who sent their scores to SFA can be examined in several ways. Table 7, for instance, presents these data in terms of relative preferences for SFA as a "first choice" or a "backup" school. In terms of total scores sent to all institutions, about forty percent of potential applicants listed SFA as either their first or second college choice. Those listing SFA as their third through sixth choice—or as a "supplemental" choice—comprise a clear majority. More importantly, students in these latter two categories have noticeably higher ACT scores than do those who prefer to attend SFA. Roughly similar patterns, though not as marked, are apparent among those actually applying to and those actually enrolling in SFA. It is interesting to note, however, that the average ACT scores of those actually applying are slightly higher than average scores for the total test-taking pool; average scores for actual entrants, moreover, are higher than those of applicants. These patterns clearly suggest that SFA is used largely as a "back-up" institution for high-scoring applicants whose first and second choices are other institutions.

Table 8 tempers this conclusion somewhat because it indicates that the likelihood of applying to SFA does increase slightly with performance on the ACT Assessment. Results on actual enrollments, though, are mixed: both very high and very low ACT performers are slightly less likely to eventually end up at SFA than are those who earn scores in the 19-26 range. These data,

though, show only the outcomes of a competitive market situation. SFA is clearly able to attract some high-ability students because they fail to gain admission to their top choice institutions and this does in fact boost SFA's entering admissions profile. At the same time, SFA is able to be more selective about admitting students at the bottom of the ability range. With respect to gaining increased shares of high-scoring students, though, these data suggest that SFA will have to do so largely by changing their first and second choices about where they want to go to college.

What, in fact, are these prior choices? Table 9 provides some insight into this question by arraying other institutions to which students interested in SFA also sent their ACT scores. Inspection of this list reveals that three of the top four—institutions with twenty percent or more "market overlap" with SFA on the ACT—are extremely likely to be "top choice" institutions for many SFA applicants. These include the Texas A&M main campus, UT-Austin, and Southwest Texas—all of which already have entering freshman selectivity levels in excess of current SFA levels. Institutions such as Baylor (12-13% overlap), University of Houston (7-8% overlap), and TCU (5-7% overlap)—though not so prominent on this list—are equally likely to be preferred choices for high-ability candidates. "Regional" competitors such as Sam Houston, Texas Tech, the University of North Texas, UT-Arlington, and Texas A&M (Commerce) also show significant market overlap with SFA. Certainly, this is to be expected with respect to high-school graduates in general because of sheer geographic proximity. Two of these institutions—North Texas and Sam Houston—also are strategically located to take geographic advantage of prime SFA recruiting grounds in the greater Dallas and greater Houston areas. Several of these institutions—most notably Texas Tech and North Texas—have also increased their admissions requirements recently. These institutions are therefore currently looking for high-ability high school graduates inside the same pool from which SFA would have to recruit such applicants.

E. Experiences of Other Institutions

The experiences of institutions that have already raised their admissions requirements allow some insight into the effects that might be expected if SFA were to do so. To investigate such experiences concretely, NCHEMS staff conducted interviews with representatives of six such institutions—three in Texas and three in other parts of the country.

The three Texas case-study institutions—North Texas, Southwest Texas, and Texas Tech—were in many ways similar in their experiences. Like SFA, all are subject to a recent legislative mandate that requires them to automatically accept the top ten percent of Texas high-school graduates applying (several had already decided to do this in anticipation of the mandate). Like SFA, all three initially established SAT/ACT cutoff scores for the various high-school rank quartiles below the top ten percent. In the period 1990-92 (and for at least one institution, several times thereafter), however, all three Texas comparison institutions raised their entrance requirements beyond these initial levels. Total increases within quartiles ranged from 50 to 100 points on the combined SAT and from 1.5 to 2 points on the ACT Assessment. Current admissions requirements for these three institutions, together with SFA's requirements, are shown in Table 10.

The three Texas institutions had similar experiences after instituting higher admissions requirements. First, all three reported gains in the entering-freshman ability profile. The average SAT score for the entering class reportedly increased 30 points for North Texas, 58 points for Southwest Texas, and 80 points for Texas Tech. In at least two cases (North Texas and Texas Tech), however, these benefits were accompanied by decreases of from five to eight percent in initial freshman class enrollment. In both cases, this was reportedly due to the increased difficulty experienced in converting admitted high-ability students into freshman enrollees—a challenge that is getting harder and harder, according to those interviewed at all three Texas institutions. In both of the institutions that experienced enrollment declines, however, this conditions either was, or was expected to, be temporary. One notable countervailing enrollment dynamic reported by some was a tendency for transfer enrollments to eventually increase as freshman classes became smaller: those not admitted up front because they could not meet stiffer enrollment requirements instead spent a year or two at a local community college, then transfer to the institution that they wanted to attend in the first place. An additional benefit reported by one institution (Southwest Texas) was a drop in academic probation rates from 42% to 22%. An interesting reported side effect in this case, though, was a corresponding increase in faculty expectations for students that was felt to be threatening retention.

The three case-study institutions outside Texas—SUNY Geneseo, Southwest Missouri State University, and Truman State University—provide a mix of different kinds of experiences as a comparison. Southwest Missouri's actions and results were markedly similar to those of the three Texas institutions. At the invitation of the state board, the university elected to become a "selective" institution and is still in the process of implementing a progressive increase in its admissions standards. As in the three Texas cases, the initial result has been a modest increase in entering class profile (up 1.5 points on the ACT Assessment) and a corresponding decrease in entering freshman enrollment. Geneseo and Truman, in contrast, represent decisions to become a very different kind of institution. Both successively raised admissions standards over the past ten years to become the most selective public institutions in their respective states. In one case, enrollments were deliberately allowed to shrink to increase quality (supported by a state subsidy for a mission change to a "liberal arts" institution); in the other, enrollments held steady as an aggressive statewide recruitment effort sought high-ability students in areas of the state where most public institutions had not yet tried to recruit them.

All six case-study institutions used broadly similar strategies to recruit high-ability students—though in varying degrees. Most initiated high-profile marketing programs and/or enlisted the help of a marketing firm to develop a new image. (In at least one case, these efforts were also targeted at alumni who, it was felt, might be projecting an "outdated" image of the institution's culture and academic standards.) At "high-end" institutions like Geneseo and Truman, this also involved target marketing with special brochures and recruitment materials emphasizing the institution's position in the *U.S. News* and *Money Magazine* ratings. Most also changed the pattern of communication with applicants—recognizing the fact that high-ability applicants apply earlier than others and need quick decisions on such matters as financial aid and other benefits. A more proactive and "personalized" approach to converting high-ability applicants into enrollees was also reported by many— including in some cases sponsored, expense-paid campus visits for high-ability students and their families. Encouraging individual colleges and academic

programs within the institution to make contact with prospective high-ability enrollees directly was another recruitment tactic reported by several institutions. Finally, most case-study institutions use dedicated scholarship programs to recruit high-ability students. Truman and Geneseo both have long-established programs of this kind, though both institutions rely primarily on the price differential between themselves and the private colleges with whom they largely compete. In the case of Texas, Southwest Texas recently received a $12 million endowment to give full merit-based scholarships to twenty-five students in each entering class. At Texas Tech, the institution has also been providing scholarships to recruit high-ability students, who receive four years of funding if they maintain a 3.0 or 3.5 GPA, depending upon the level of scholarship they are given.

F. Conclusions and Recommendations

Information and analyses presented in the previous four sections suggest a number of summary conclusions about SFA's current market and its future potential to substantially raise the number of entering high-ability students:

- SFA currently draws new freshmen of all ability levels from a fairly delimited geographic area that consists of two distinct market areas—the counties immediately surrounding the campus and three urban/suburban regions; this is also where the vast majority of the state's high-ability students are located. Therefore, SFA is already looking in the right places for high-ability students.

- it is unlikely that current yields of high-ability students in the SFA local area can be much improved upon. Raising admissions rates and admitted-student conversion rates for high-ability students in all of the counties in the greater Houston, greater Dallas, and Central Texas market areas to the levels historically attained somewhere in each of these regions appears attainable, and would yield about 25% more (or about 75) such students in an entering freshman class. Gains in these market areas beyond this point would appear difficult to achieve.

- SFA currently functions largely as a "back-up" institution for large numbers of high-ability students whose first and second choices are more selective universities, and this is unlikely to change. At the same time, several regional institutions are better positioned geographically to seek students in the urban/suburban market areas from which SFA must draw—and several of these have also recently raised their admissions standards. Both conditions mean that SFA will face substantial competition in seeking high-ability new freshmen in the regions where it currently recruits.

- raising admissions standards at SFA would likely result in a short-term decline in new freshmen enrollment.

Given these overall conditions, it is recommended that SFA use one of the following two approaches should it decide to increase high-ability students:

- **keep its current admissions standards in place and concentrate instead on a number of "low profile" efforts to attract high-ability students.** Experience at other institutions suggests that such efforts might include target marketing for such graduates, increased personal contact at all points in the admissions process, and greater use of merit-based scholarships. SFA has taken positive steps with programs such as SFA 101, the academic resource center, FIG's program and other similar programs to attract and retain high-ability students. Expanding these and initiating other programs would assist in attracting high-ability students. SFA has also done a good job in attracting high-ability students through the Academic Excellence Scholarship Program. Much of the increase in high-ability students in the last few years can be attributed to this program. This program would need to be expanded in order to increase the yield of a higher caliber student. Using such methods, attaining the enrollment goals embodied in the simulated "base model" appears feasible. But it should be clearly understood that this will yield a relatively modest number of new high-ability students.

- **gradually increase admission standards over time without a significant break with past standards.** Under this strategy, several incremental increases in admission standards would each be followed by a period of time to allow the enrollment of high-ability students to increase to a prescribed number. After achieving this target, another increase in admission standards could be made. Using this strategy, the enrollment impacts that might result from higher admissions standards would be spread over a period of time and would lessen the severity of a large decrease in enrollment. This approach would also require expansion of both the Academic Excellence Scholarship Program and the student success programs mentioned above.

Both these approaches avoid establishing a markedly higher recruitment bracket publicly and deliberately. Doing so would involve widespread head-to-head competition with other regional institutions. As a result, this approach is not recommended.

All told, SFA has established a successful market niche in a competitive regional marketplace. Its advantage in this marketplace appears currently based on its location and on the kinds of experiences that the campus can offer a largely residential student population drawn from middle-class households in urban/suburban east and mid-Texas. Actions taken to raise SFA's admissions profile—though appropriate and feasible on a limited basis—must be continually tempered by recognition of where the institution's real strengths in attracting students already lie.

Chart 1

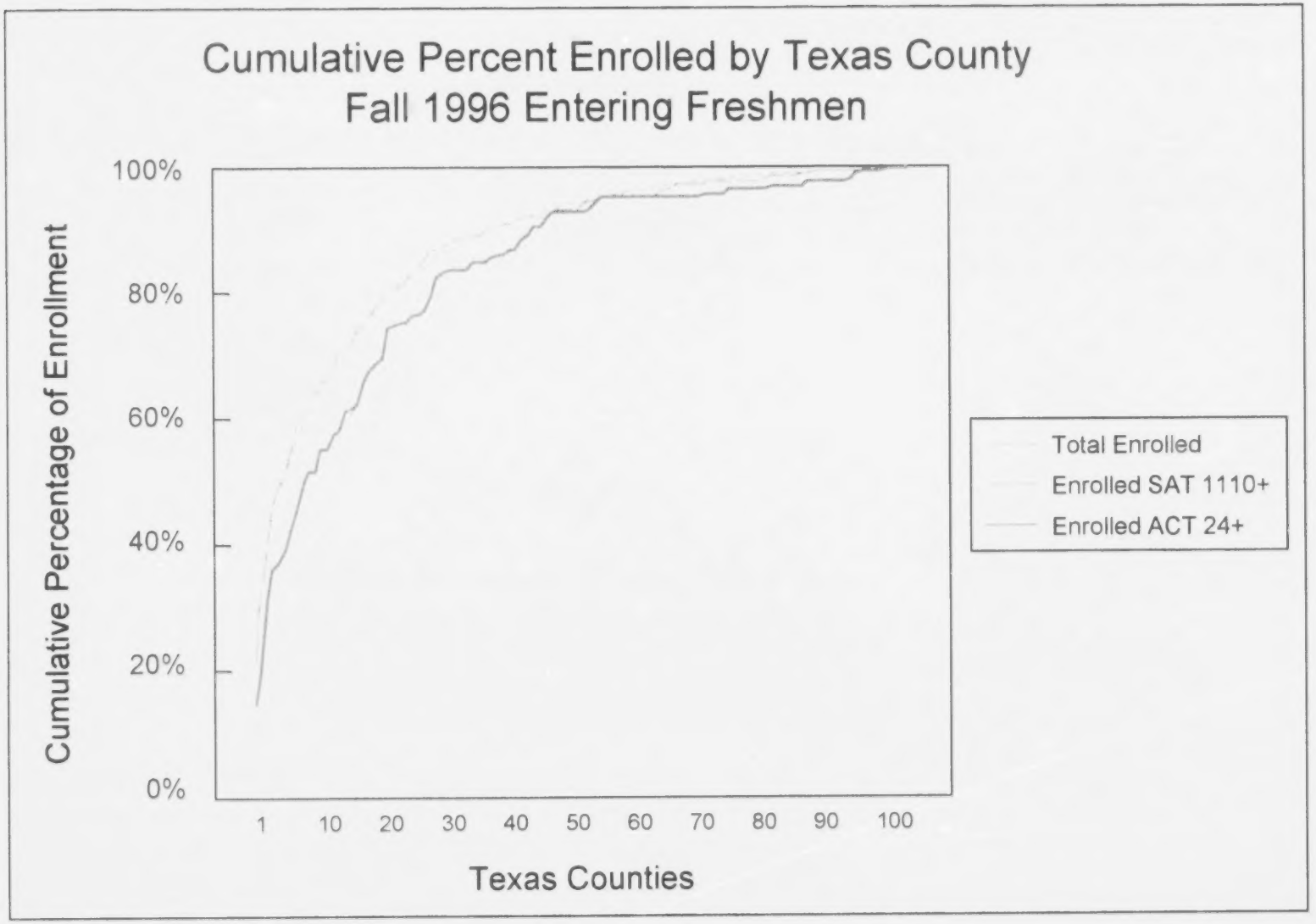
Cumulative Percent Enrolled by Texas County
Fall 1996 Entering Freshmen
Cumulative Percentage of Enrollment
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
1
10
20
30
40
50
60
70
80
90
100
Texas Counties
Total Enrolled
Enrolled SAT 1110+
Enrolled ACT 24+

Chart 2

New SFA Freshmen Enrollment - Total by County, Fall 1996

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Chart 3

Statewide Pool of High SAT High School Graduates (SAT >1110), Fall 1996

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Chart 4

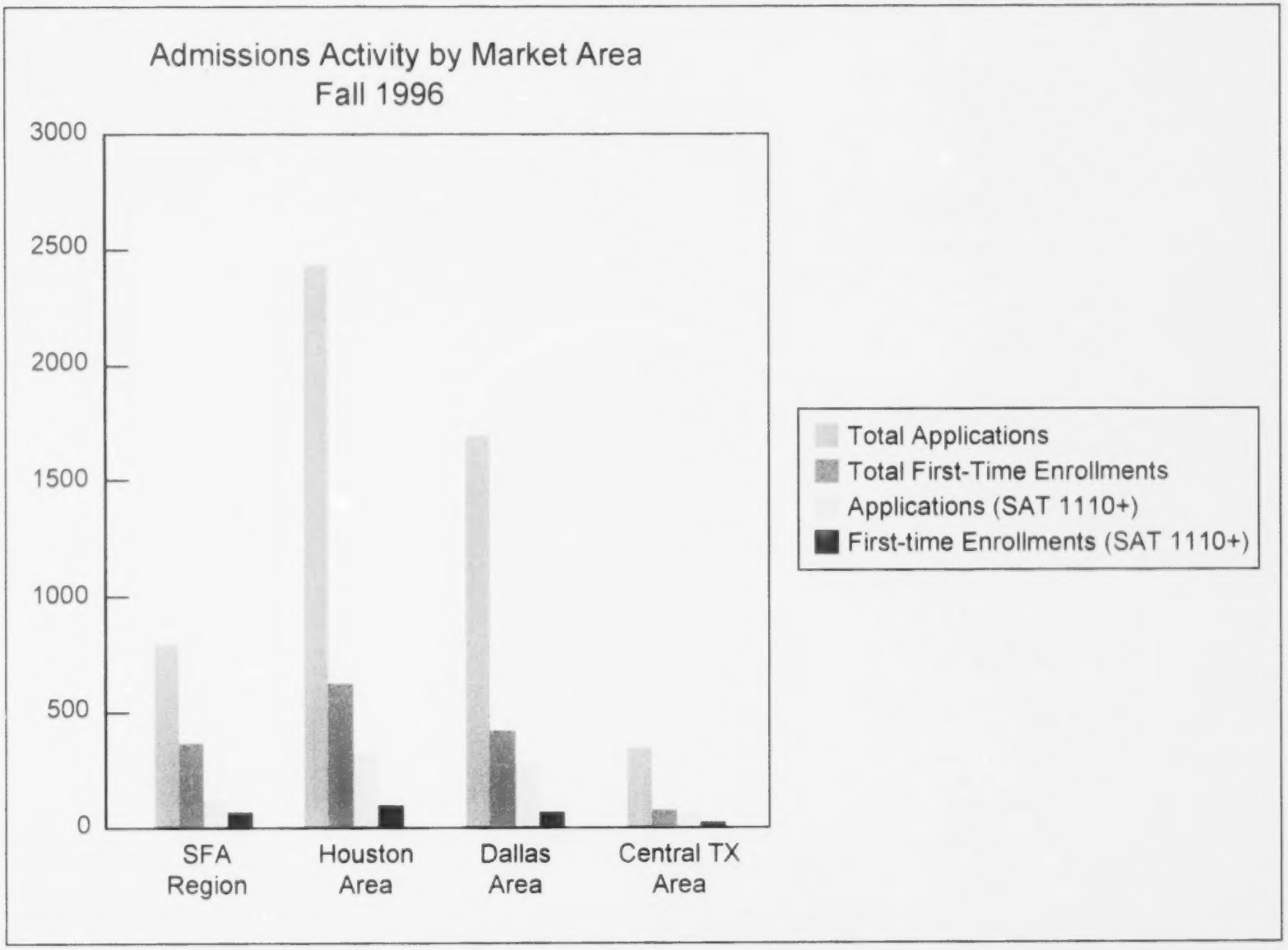
Admissions Activity by Market Area
Fall 1996
3000
2500
2000
1500
1000
500
0
SFA Region
Houston Area
Dallas Area
Central TX Area
Total Applications
Total First-Time Enrollments
Applications (SAT 1110+)
First-time Enrollments (SAT 1110+)

Chart 5

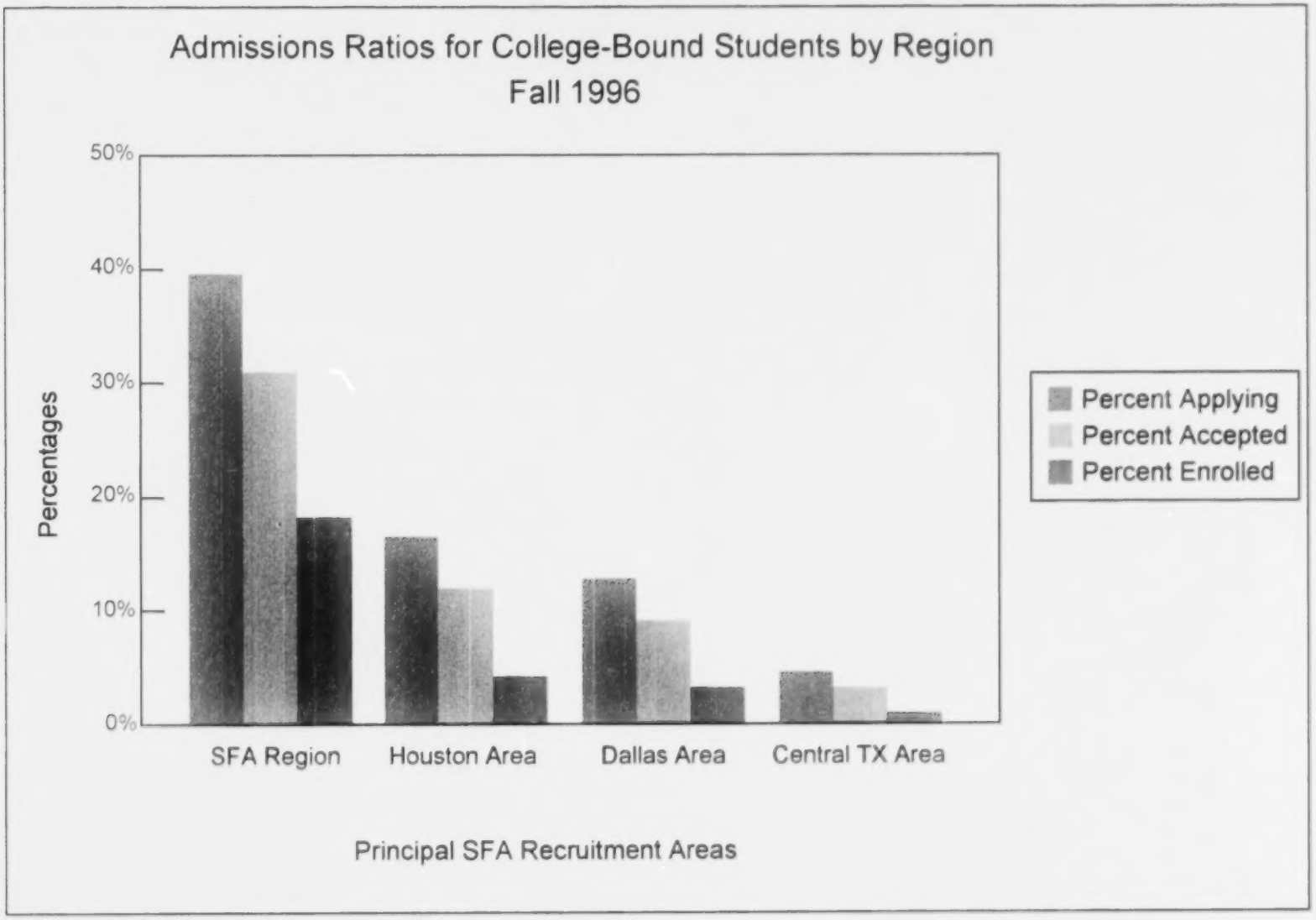
Admissions Ratios for College-Bound Students by Region
Fall 1996
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Percentages
SFA Region
Houston Area
Dallas Area
Central TX Area
Principal SFA Recruitment Areas
Percent Applying
Percent Accepted
Percent Enrolled

Chart 6

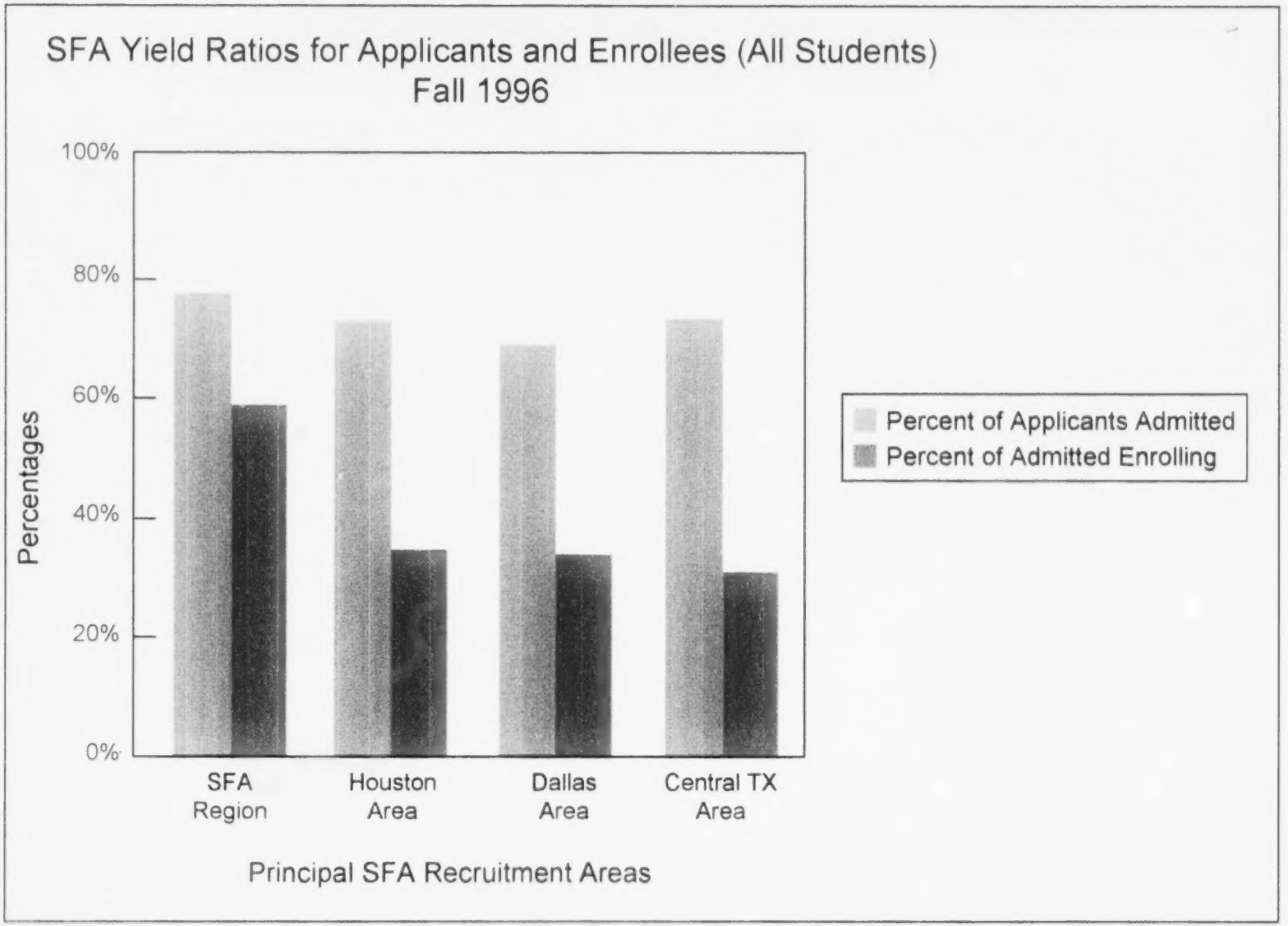
SFA Yield Ratios for Applicants and Enrollees (All Students)
Fall 1996
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Percentages
SFA Region
Houston Area
Dallas Area
Central TX Area
Principal SFA Recruitment Areas
Percent of Applicants Admitted
Percent of Admitted Enrolling

Chart 7

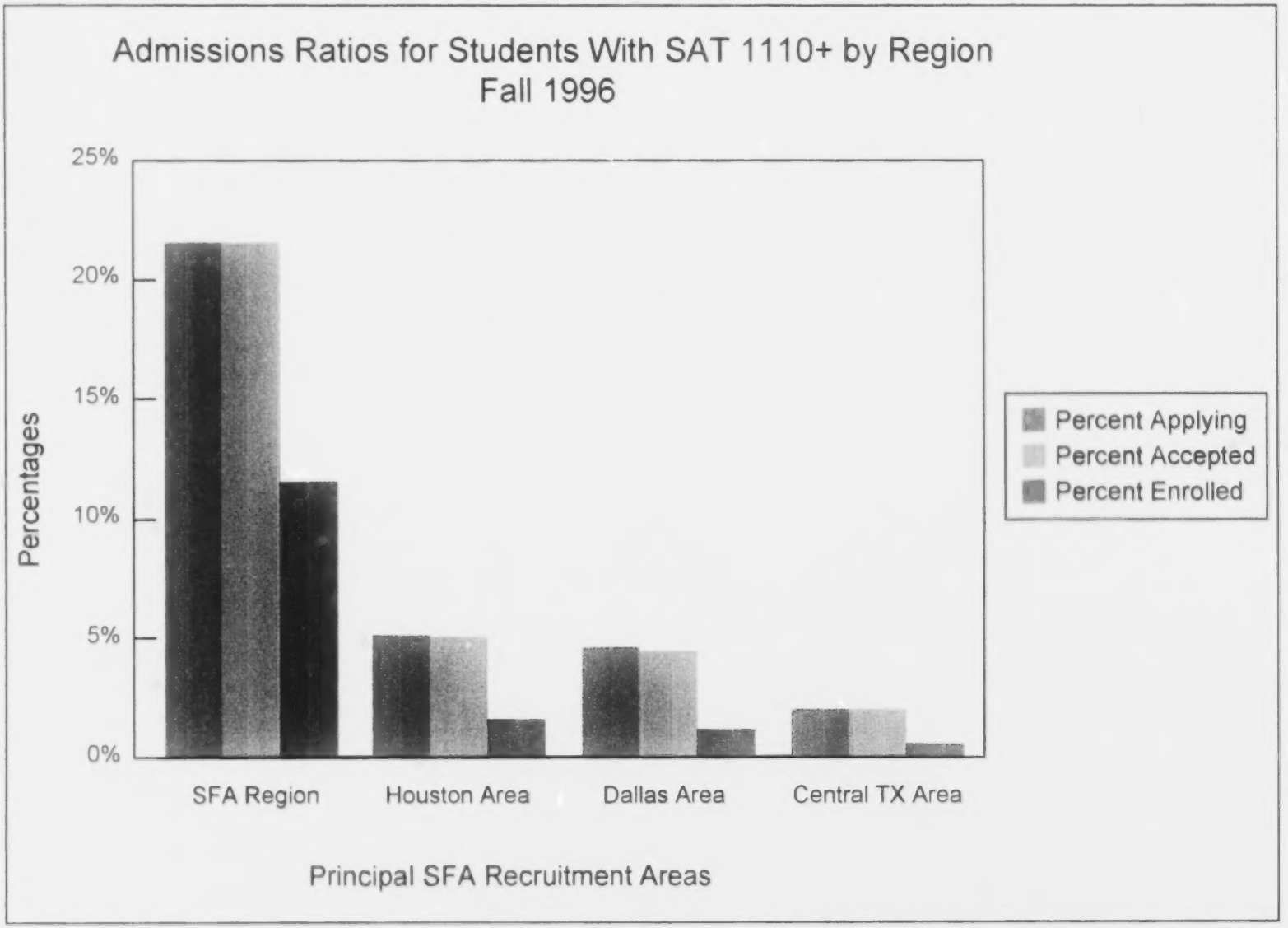
Admissions Ratios for Students With SAT 1110+ by Region
Fall 1996
25%
20%
15%
10%
5%
0%
Percentages
SFA Region
Houston Area
Dallas Area
Central TX Area
Principal SFA Recruitment Areas
Percent Applying
Percent Accepted
Percent Enrolled

Chart 8

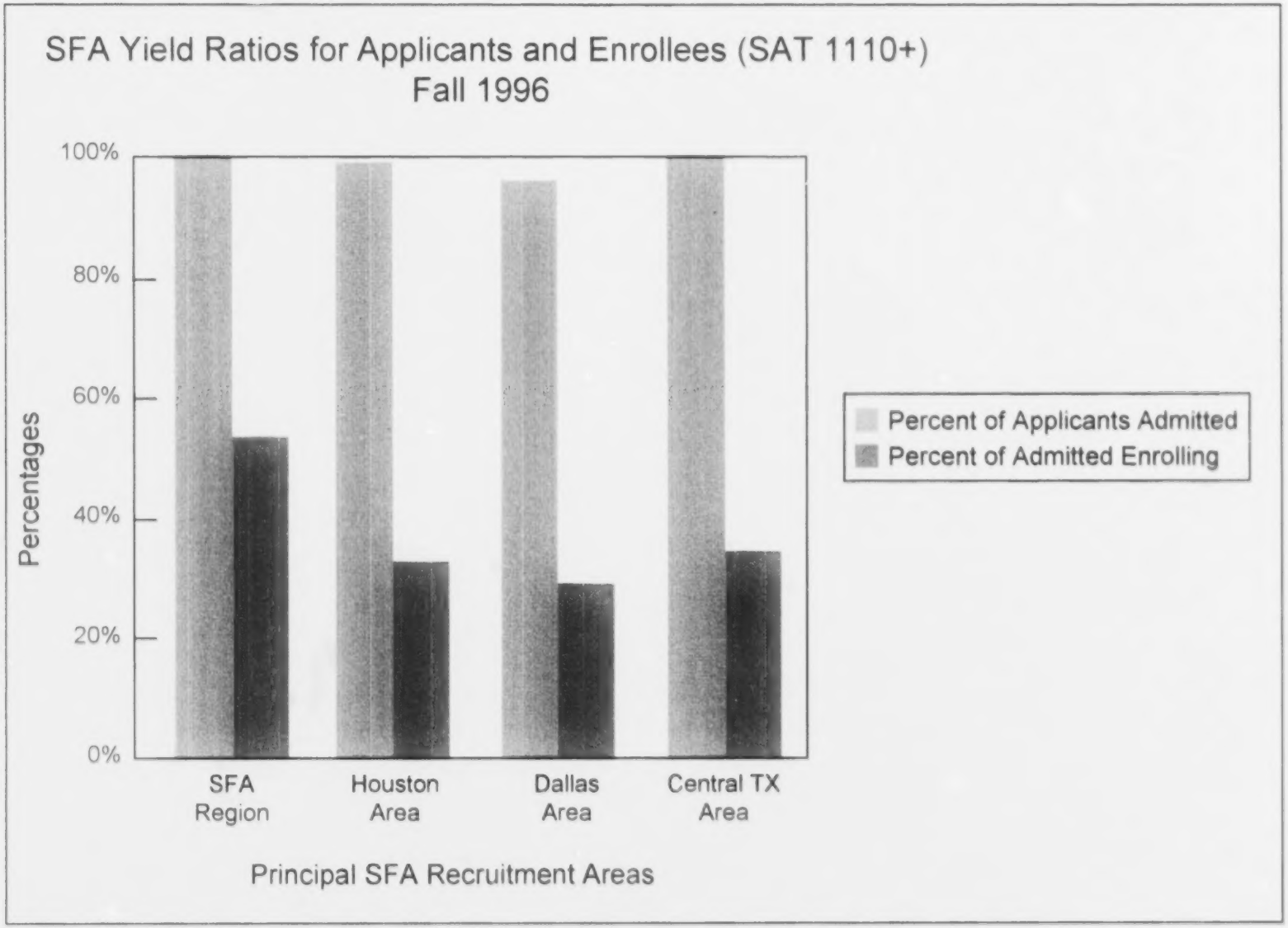
SFA Yield Ratios for Applicants and Enrollees (SAT 1110+)
Fall 1996
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
Percentages
SFA Region
Houston Area
Dallas Area
Central TX Area
Principal SFA Recruitment Areas
Percent of Applicants Admitted
Percent of Admitted Enrolling

Table 1

SFA's Principal Market Regions (Fall 1996)

		% of Total Entering Class	% of SAT 1110+ Entrants	% of Statewide Pool of SAT 1110+
A.	SFA Local Area	20.8%	22.7%	3.3%
B.	East Texas Urban/Suburban Areas:	59.0%	57.7%	70.1%
	Houston Area	33.5%	31.0%	29.3%
	Dallas Area	21.0%	20.6%	26.8%
	Central Texas Area	4.4%	6.1%	13.9%
Total		79.8%	80.4%	74.4%

Table 2

Admissions Yields for Counties Within SFA Local Area
Fall 1996

Counties	All College-Bound*			High-Ability College-Bound (SAT > 1110)		
	% of Pool Applying	% of Pool Accepted	% of Pool Enrolling	% of Pool Applying	% of Pool Accepted	% of Pool Enrolling
Nacogdoches	108.5%**	86.5%	69.4%	66.0%	66.0%	52.0%
Angelina	56.7%	42.6%	23.2%	41.8%	41.8%	25.5%
Jasper	60.4%	47.8%	29.9%	40.7%	40.7%	22.2%
Gregg	21.7%	16.1%	7.1%	10.5%	10.5%	3.3%
Orange	27.8%	22.8%	9.4%	13.0%	13.0%	6.5%
Cherokee	53.4%	46.6%	33.0%	25.0%	25.0%	12.5%
Shelby	51.0%	42.0%	30.6%	55.6%	55.6%	22.2%
Smith	18.2%	13.4%	4.6%	12.1%	12.1%	3.4%
Rusk	40.0%	30.4%	16.0%	33.3%	33.3%	22.2%

* Pool defined as all graduates taking the SAT

** Greater than 100% entry is due to large number of applications to SFA from students who graduated from high school prior to 1995-96.

Table 3

Admissions Yields for Counties Outside SFA Local Area
Fall 1996

Counties	All College-Bound*			High-Ability College-Bound (SAT > 1110)		
	% of Pool Applying	% of Pool Accepted	% of Pool Enrolling	% of Pool Applying	% of Pool Accepted	% of Pool Enrolling
Harris	17.1%	12.4%	4.4%	5.2%	5.2%	1.8%
Fort Bend	15.0%	10.4%	3.9%	4.9%	4.9%	1.6%
Montgomery	20.7%	15.3%	5.6%	5.4%	5.4%	1.8%
Galveston	10.2%	7.7%	2.9%	1.8%	1.8%	0.3%
Brazoria	16.3%	12.9%	3.8%	8.6%	8.6%	1.7%
Jefferson	16.3%	12.1%	3.9%	9.5%	9.5%	1.5%
Dallas	11.9%	8.6%	3.3%	4.5%	4.3%	1.3%
Tarrant	11.8%	8.0%	2.9%	4.2%	4.0%	1.2%
Collin	16.4%	12.4%	3.1%	5.4%	5.4%	0.9%
Denton	14.5%	10.2%	2.6%	5.1%	5.1%	0.8%
Ellis	15.1%	10.5%	5.5%	6.9%	6.9%	4.0%
Travis	8.6%	6.3%	2.2%	2.9%	2.9%	0.9%
Bexar	2.8%	2.0%	0.5%	1.5%	1.5%	0.5%
Williamson	6.5%	4.8%	2.0%	1.8%	1.8%	0.7%

* Pool defined as all graduates taking the SAT

Table 4

Admissions Ratios for Counties Within SFA Local Area
Fall 1996

Counties	All College-Bound			High-Ability College-Bound (SAT > 1110)		
	% of Applicants Admitted	% of Admits Enrolling	% of SFA Freshmen	% of Applicants Admitted	% of Admits Enrolling	% of SFA Freshmen
Nacogdoches	79.7%	80.3%	6.7%	100.0%	78.8%	8.0%
Angelina	75.0%	54.4%	2.6%	100.0%	60.9%	4.3%
Jasper	79.0%	62.5%	2.1%	100.0%	54.5%	1.8%
Gregg	73.9%	44.1%	1.6%	100.0%	31.3%	2.1%
Orange	82.0%	41.1%	1.6%	100.0%	50.0%	1.5%
Cherokee	87.2%	70.7%	1.5%	100.0%	50.0%	0.6%
Shelby	82.5%	72.7%	1.3%	100.0%	40.0%	0.6%
Smith	73.5%	34.4%	1.1%	100.0%	28.6%	1.8%
Rusk	76.0%	52.6%	1.1%	100.0%	66.7%	0.6%

Table 5

Admissions Ratios for Counties Outside SFA Local Area
Fall 1996

Counties	All College-Bound			High-Ability College-Bound (SAT > 1110)		
	% of Applicants Admitted	% of Admits Enrolling	% of SFA Freshmen	% of Applicants Admitted	% of Admits Enrolling	% of SFA Freshmen
Harris	72.6%	35.7%	22.7%	99.0%	34.1%	21.8%
Fort Bend	69.4%	37.9%	3.2%	100.0%	33.3%	4.0%
Montgomery	74.0%	36.6%	2.8%	100.0%	33.3%	2.1%
Galveston	75.6%	37.6%	1.9%	100.0%	18.2%	0.6%
Brazoria	79.2%	29.1%	1.6%	100.0%	20.0%	1.5%
Jefferson	74.3%	32.1%	1.4%	100.0%	15.8%	0.9%
Dallas	72.8%	38.4%	10.5%	94.4%	30.7%	9.5%
Tarrant	68.0%	35.7%	6.0%	96.1%	30.1%	6.7%
Collin	75.5%	25.0%	2.6%	100.0%	16.7%	2.8%
Denton	70.1%	26.0%	1.8%	100.0%	16.7%	1.5%
Ellis	69.8%	52.3%	1.2%	100.0%	57.1%	0.9%
Travis	73.9%	34.3%	1.9%	100.0%	31.0%	2.8%
Bexar	69.9%	25.8%	1.3%	100.0%	33.3%	2.1%
Williamson	73.0%	42.6%	1.2%	100.0%	36.4%	1.2%

Table 6

Simulated Results of Changing Admissions Parameters

Model Parameters*		High-Ability Enrollment Yield for Entering Freshmen	
% of Pool Applying	% of Applicants Enrolling	# of Freshmen w/ SAT > 1110	% of Total Class
5.0%	33.3%	339	22.5%
5.5	33.3	364	24.2
5.5	35.0	377	25.0
6.0	35.0	403	26.8
6.0	37.5	425	28.2
6.5	37.5	453	30.1
6.5	40.0	476	31.6
7.0	40.0	506	33.6
7.0	42.5	531	35.3
	Current SFA Situation		
4.4%	29.6%	262	17.4%
Total Number of Entering Freshmen		1888	[100.0%]

* Assumes "Base Model" as Start Point; Application and Enrollment % are for Houston and Dallas Area Counties with Application % two percent lower for Central Texas Counties.

Table 7

Students Taking ACT and Sending Scores to SFA
By Intent to Enroll - 1995-97

	Total Scores Sent (ACT Avg)	Total Applied to SFA (ACT Avg)	Total Enrolled at SFA (ACT Avg)	Total Not Enrolled at SFA (ACT Avg)
1995-96				
SFA 1st Choice	1228 (19.4) 18.8%	708 (19.6) 17.9%	320 (20.1) 31.2%	908 (19.1) 17.5%
SFA 2nd Choice	1452 (19.6) 22.3%	575 (20.1) 14.5%	149 (20.5) 14.5%	1303 (19.5) 25.1%
SFA 3rd-6th Choice	1649 (20.0) 25.3%	599 (20.2) 15.1%	125 (20.5) 12.1%	1524 (20.0) 29.4%
Supplemental Choice	2185 (20.3) 33.5%	2073 (20.3) 52.4%	433 (20.7) 42.1%	1752 (20.2) 33.8%
Total	6514 (19.9)	3955 (20.1)	1027 (20.5)	5487 (19.8)
1996-97				
SFA 1st Choice	1362 (19.3) 19.2%	837 (19.6) 18.2%	399 (19.9) 33.1%	963 (19.1) 16.3%
SFA 2nd Choice	1590 (19.6) 22.3%	690 (20.1) 15.0%	185 (20.1) 15.4%	1405 (19.6) 23.8%
SFA 3rd-6th Choice	1674 (20.0) 23.5%	663 (20.3) 14.4%	120 (21.0) 10.0%	1554 (19.9) 26.3%
Supplemental Choice	2486 (20.5) 34.9%	2409 (20.4) 52.4%	500 (20.9) 41.5%	1986 (20.4) 33.6%
Total	7112 (19.9)	4599 (20.2)	1204 (20.4)	5908 (19.9)

Table 8

Admissions Activity by ACT Score Range: 1995-97

1995-96

	Total Scores Sent	Total Applied to SFA (% of Scores)		Total Enrolled at SFA (% of Scores)		Total Not Enrolled at SFA (% of Scores)	
ACT 27-36	329	216	(65.6%)	54	(16.4%)	275	(83.6%)
ACT 22-26	1698	1069	(62.9%)	321	(18.9%)	1377	(81.1%)
ACT 19-21	2078	1325	(63.7%)	372	(17.9%)	1706	(82.0%)
ACT 1-18	2537	1413	(55.7%)	311	(12.3%)	2226	(87.7%)
Total	6642	4023	(60.6%)	1058	(15.9%)	5584	(84.1%)

1996-97

ACT 27-36	390	281	(72.1%)	57	(14.6%)	333	(85.4%)
ACT 22-26	1940	1345	(69.3%)	420	(21.6%)	1520	(78.3%)
ACT 19-21	2133	1396	(65.4%)	366	(17.2%)	1767	(82.8%)
ACT 1-18	2731	1635	(59.8%)	387	(14.2%)	2344	(85.8%)
Total	7194	4657	(64.7%)	1230	(17.1%)	5964	(82.9%)

Table 9

Top 20 Institutions in Competition with SFA
Analysis of ACT Score Overlap)

	1996-97		1997-98	
	No. of Scores Also Sent to SFA	**% of SFA Total**	**No. of Scores Also Sent to SFA**	**% of SFA Total**
Texas A&M (Main)	1390	30.9%	1494	31.6%
Southwest Texas	1141	25.3	1244	26.4
UT-Austin	1001	22.2	1058	22.4
Sam Houston	938	20.8	1001	21.2
Texas Tech	861	19.1	925	13.8
University of North Texas	580	12.9	650	13.8
Baylor	541	12.0	653	13.8
University of Houston	346	7.7	409	8.7
Tyler Junior College	243	5.4	277	5.9
TCU	241	5.3	353	7.5
Angelina College	228	5.1	193	4.1
UT-Arlington	228	5.1	245	5.2
Texas A&M (Commerce)	225	5.0	257	5.4
Kilgore College	213	4.7	207	4.4
Tarlton State	194	4.3	202	4.3
Blinn College	136	3.0	166	3.5
UT-San Antonio	136	3.0	148	3.1
Angelo State	136	3.0	106	2.2
Abilene Christian	134	3.0	120	2.5
Lamar University	130	2.9	168	3.6
SFA Total	4505	[100%]	4721	[100%]

Table 10

Current Admissions Requirements
for Selected Texas Institutions - SAT/ACT Score Cutoffs

		High School Rank			
	Top 10%	Top Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Bottom Quarter
North Texas	Automatic	920/19	1010/21	1100/24	1180/27
Southwest Texas	Automatic	920	1010	1180	1270
Texas Tech	Automatic	930	1010/22	1170	1170
SFA	Automatic	None	None	1010/21	1010/21